



Nov 17, 2020

***The Coalition for TJ is disappointed that nothing new was brought to the latest FCPS proposals, and as outlined below, one "barrier" has been traded - the test - for additional barriers that discriminate against high performing students and do nothing to identify the students who truly need TJ, not just that would benefit from TJ.***

FAIRFAX COUNTY, Va. -- Fairfax County Public Schools Superintendent Scott Brabrand has once again failed northern Virginia families, proposing a slightly modified "holistic" admissions proposal for Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology and simply adding window dressing to his previous "merit lottery."

In issuing the plans, to be discussed at a "work session" with school board members on Tuesday, he has ignored the Fairfax County School Board's directives to come back with new options. The Coalition for TJ urges the Fairfax County School Board to reject Mr. Brabrand's expectation that its members will rubber stamp his flawed plan. Instead, it must restore the merit-based, race-blind test that has been a part of TJ's admissions process, implement a "second look" plan to increase representation of underrepresented minorities and engage the community -- including parents -- in actual stakeholder discussions.

The crusade against TJ must stop.

Superintendent Brabrand claims he has removed the "barrier" of the race-blind, merit-based test to TJ and replaced it with new barriers:

1. **He has identified no objective measure of merit.** Instead, his criteria stipulate that **students *must* be in Advanced Academic Programs to qualify for entry into TJ.** The only way students will be able to meet these criteria are, of course, by being in AAP. While most students offered admission in the past have been in AAP, not *all* of the students were in AAP.

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J. BELLINGER  
RPR, CRR

- He has stated that students must demonstrate “strong preparation for TJHSST coursework by being enrolled in **both math and science honors courses.**”
- He stated students must reveal “overall academic rigor by being **enrolled in one additional honors course (English or Social Studies)** or being identified as a **Young Scholar.**”

How will private school or homeschooled students be evaluated? Such students may not have classes specifically designated as AAP or “Honors” classes. **Would students like this qualify or not?**

2. **He has identified “Experience Factors”** as a criterion, but these will weigh against many students around the county and are subjective. These “Experience Factors” essentially discriminate against non-high need students (FARM, English language learners, special education, etc.). So, many applicants will be at a disadvantage with a quarter of the “holistic” requirements for admission being the “Experience Factor.”
3. He added enrollment in the Young Scholars program as a criterion for admission, but the Young Scholars program is only available at select schools and a new barrier for admission.
4. **He maintains “Regional Pathways.”** With a purely “holistic” process, why keep the “Region Pathways,” especially with the “Experience Factor”? That’s weighting the process even more against non-high need students. And why is Prince William County -- the home county for the president of the activist TJ Alumni Action Group and the Secretary of Education -- receiving an explosion in new seats at the expense of Loudoun County?
5. **He increased the capacity of TJ to 550 students per class.** Capacity in the earlier proposals was increased to 500. Before this debate, FCPS officials have stated that the TJ capacity number is exaggerated because the design of the school includes square footage for a number of common spaces that were added into a redesign of the school. We caution against increasing capacity to 550 **without performing a true study of the realistic capacity, given the common spaces and the need for lab spaces.** There needs to be an evaluation of the need for potentially adding labs given the increased number of students. We advise against pulling a number out of the air. Evaluate the true impact of adding additional students before deciding on the increase.
6. **Mr. Brabrand identifies “stakeholder engagement” that he completed, but he failed completely to reach out to current or prospective parents in the process,** even though TJ parents are a large -- and perhaps *the largest* -- stakeholder group along with the parents of prospective students. Instead, Mr. Brabrand has vilified parents for helping their students prepare for the rigors of TJ through academic enrichment activities and preparation for the test. Any athlete goes through preparation and training for their sport. Yet when our “sport” is excellence in academics and enrichment activities, such as Science Olympiad, Math Counts and coding classes, parents are vilified as giving students an unfair advantage. We reject this vilification and marginalization of parents.
7. **The new plan continues to be race-based and unconstitutional.** All of the “Accountability Metrics” measure only one thing: **Diversity and Inclusion issues.**

These are major changes to the admissions process. **How will these changes affect how well incoming students are prepared for the rigor and pace of the TJ curriculum?**

A number of questions remain.

Where are metrics for:

- The number of students needing remediation
- The number of students meeting the B average requirement
- The number of students in the Class of 2025 and subsequent years who disenroll from TJ
- What are the reasons for disenrollment?

The message is clear. Superintendent Brabrand and the School Board need to return to the drawing board -- and stop their campaign to destroy gifted STEM education at the nation's No. 1 high school with half-baked proposals.